

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

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Secretary Clinton on Flooding in Australia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
January 3, 2011

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON**Flooding in Australia**

On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I offer my condolences for the loss of life and damage in Queensland caused by the recent flooding. Our Embassy in Canberra is monitoring the situation and has been in contact with Australian authorities. Australia is an important partner and close friend of the United States and we stand ready to provide assistance. Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone affected by these floods, especially the families of the victims, and with all the people of Australia.

Coal Plants Take a Back Seat

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — Construction of coal-fired power plants has slowed significantly in the United States as a sluggish economy and uncertainties surrounding future energy policy make electric utilities rethink their investment plans.

Power companies did not break ground on a single new coal plant in 2009 or 2010, the environmental group Sierra Club reported recently. Edison Electric Institute, a trade organization representing the nation's largest power companies, confirmed the fact.

The federal government's Energy Information Administration (EIA) said last month that it is not expecting any new plants to begin construction in 2011 either.

Coal-fired electricity accounts for about 28 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, which is why the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is targeting power plants in its effort to tackle climate change.

Coal plants provide about 45 percent of the electricity consumed in the United States, down from 51 percent a decade earlier, EIA statistics show.

"There is continuing and ongoing uncertainty around future energy policy, and particularly around carbon," said Jim Owen, a spokesman for Edison Electric Institute. "Couple that with the great emphasis right now on

renewables and energy efficiency, and with relatively low natural gas prices that many people expect to continue for some time. All that tells you that people are not going to line up to build coal any time soon."

Sierra Club and other groups concerned about clean air have welcomed the coal industry slump. They hope that the emerging market for renewable and clean energy will gradually replace generating capacity and jobs lost in coal.

Meanwhile, a recent drop in natural gas prices has prompted many utilities to replace aging coal plants with gas-fired generation. Natural gas plants release about half the amount of carbon dioxide that coal plants produce, and they are easier to get permission to locate and build.

A GREATER ENERGY MIX

The coal mining industry employs some 84,600 Americans. Another 134,200 people work in the fossil fuel electric-generating industry, federal statistics show.

That means many jobs are at stake when construction of coal plants is delayed — but also that employment is growing in the industries that are taking advantage of federal subsidies and loan guarantees for clean energy projects. The American Wind Energy Association says 85,000 people work in wind today, about the same number of Americans employed in coal mines.

Frank Graves, a principal at the Brattle Group, a Boston-based consulting company with a large energy practice, said coal will continue to be an important — although shrinking — part of the U.S. energy landscape. There are 13,000 megawatts of coal-fired electric generating capacity under construction that will likely come online in the next couple of years, he said.

"It's not as much as they had planned to construct, but it's not as if the coal industry has been frozen in its tracks," Graves said.

A recent Brattle Group study that Graves co-authored with colleague Metin Celebi describes a looming challenge for coal plants: emerging federal rules on emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and mercury that are considered hazardous to human health.

According to this study, the regulations would cost power companies an estimated \$180 billion in plant upgrades and send 20 percent of coal plants into retirement over the next decade.

With the economic picture expected to brighten and demand for energy growing in 2011, utilities will need to boost capacity. To what degree they'll bet on coal in the

future is uncertain.

"The reality is becoming much more complex for utilities," Graves said. "Gas looks safer and cheaper right now."

Terror Attacks in Egypt and Nigeria Condemned by American Muslims

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — American Muslim groups denounced the New Year's terror attacks in Egypt and Nigeria that killed and injured dozens of people as "barbaric" and "heinous" while offering prayers to the victims and their families.

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), one of the United States' largest Muslim organizations, condemned the attacks and called on officials in Egypt and Nigeria to bring the perpetrators to justice.

"ISNA condemns any and all acts of violence against innocent civilians," said ISNA's president, Imam Mohamed Magid. "The attacks in Egypt and Nigeria are unacceptable, and ISNA urges the Egyptian and Nigerian governments to take all measures to prosecute the individuals responsible for these heinous crimes."

A terror attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt, killed 21 people and wounded dozens more, as worshippers attended a mass marking the New Year. In Abuja, Nigeria, an attack near an army barracks took the lives of up to 20 Muslims and Christians and wounded many more.

ISNA said in its press release that such violence "requires us to double our efforts in promoting religious harmony and the right of people to worship free from fear and violence everywhere in the world."

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), America's largest Muslim civil liberties organization, echoed ISNA's condemnation of the attacks. In a media statement, CAIR repudiated the "apparent motive" of the attackers, to harm relations between Muslims and Christians.

"We offer sincere condolences to the loved ones of those killed or injured and call on authorities in both nations to bring the perpetrators to justice," said the CAIR statement, adding that the best response to these "cowardly acts" is to work harder at building relations between people of different faiths.

The Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), an organization that encourages American Muslims to

participate in civic life, issued a statement saying that it "mourns the loss of Christian lives" from the terror attack in Egypt.

"We as Muslim Americans are horrified, along with Christians and all people of faith" about "this atrocious act," said MPAC President Salam Al-Marayati. "Whoever committed this evil act, especially during a religious service, can only be described as a heinous criminal."

Al-Marayati's group also pledged to work with America's Coptic Christian community.

"MPAC will reach out to Coptic Christian leaders in the U.S. to mourn together, offer any assistance needed at this perilous time, and work together for greater protection and harmony between Muslims and Christian minorities abroad," the MPAC statement said.

The Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC), which represents more than 400,000 Muslims in the Chicago region, reached out to the Coptic Christian community in the wake of the attack in Egypt.

"We stand in support of the Coptic Christian community in Egypt and our neighbors of the Coptic faith in Chicago," said CIOGC chairman Zaher Sahloul. "We denounce this terrorist act and all acts of heinous violence that target innocent civilians, especially in houses of worship. Muslims and all faith groups are united in condemning such senseless crimes."

With New Show, Sarah Shahi Is Ready for Her Close-Up

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — Sarah Shahi says she never has had a master plan for her acting career. "I have no idea what is in store," she said. "I just hope that, whatever it is, I keep surprising people in a good way. I know that I've been attracted to the roles before the money, and I hope that that attitude will take me to where the two will combine nicely."

That attitude — plus her looks, talent and hard work — has taken her to the leading role in a new American network TV show, a first for an Iranian-American actor. *Fairly Legal* premieres January 20 on the USA Network.

Shahi, who grew up in Texas, has been in front of audiences since age 8, when her parents entered her in her first of many beauty pageants. She sang in classical choirs, took voice lessons, appeared in musical theater and went to college in Dallas with hopes of becoming an actress. Other cast members in a college production of the musical

Chicago suggested she try out for the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, a group about as famous as the American football team it represents, and she was accepted. That led to a job as an extra in a movie that was shooting in Dallas and encouragement from the movie's director.

"I had no idea who he was, and for whatever reason, he took a liking to me, probably because he sensed that I didn't want anything from him or need anything from him," Shahi said. "On the final day that he was there, he said, 'What is it you want to do?' And I said, 'Well, I want to be an actress, but I just don't know how to go about it out here.' And he said, 'You know, you need to move to [Los Angeles]. I think you have what it takes.' And he gave me his office number and his cell number, and he said, 'When you get there, call me. I want to help you.'"

The director was Robert Altman, one of Hollywood's most acclaimed filmmakers, who died in 2006. Shahi said that after trading a few missed phone calls with him, she learned how important he was and "became so intimidated that I never called him again." Instead, "I kind of just started making my own mark in Hollywood, as little as it is."

Her mark has become bigger. Shahi, who turns 31 a few days before her new show airs, has built her career steadily since leaving Texas for Los Angeles at age 19. She has gone from small roles in TV shows and a few movies to major recurring roles in two series: playing a Mexican-American disc jockey on the Showtime series *The L Word* and playing a detective overcoming drug addiction on the NBC show *Life*. She also has appeared on various lists of Hollywood's most beautiful and sexiest actresses.

She said she knows that's not enough.

"Pretty girls are a dime a dozen in this town, so if you want to last, you have to have a little bit more than that," she said. "I think I've got something. Can I tell you what it is? No, I don't know what it is."

One thing Shahi knows she has is the discipline to take advantage of opportunities when they come along. "I work hard, I continue to work hard, and I guess whenever it's the right time, the right project and the right talent — when those three things meet and collide — I guess that's when and why I've gotten things," she said.

That discipline has been part of Shahi's makeup since childhood. "My parents split up when I was pretty young, and my mother had three kids and had to take care of all of them by herself, and I was the middle child. So I grew up really quickly, and have, at times, what I think is too much maturity," she said.

Her background is reflected in the roles she chooses, she

added. "I like to play people that are fighters because given my childhood and my mother and my background, that's what I know, is to be a fighter," she said. "But I don't like to play perfect people. I don't like to play people who have it all figured out because to me that's boring and not interesting, and it's also not real."

Shahi's new role, of lawyer-turned-mediator Kate Reed, is an appealing if imperfect character who reflects, in part, Shahi's personality. "Kate and I are very similar in the sense that we're both very feisty, very sort of flirty people, like-to-grab-life ... kind of girls," Shahi said. "The part that we don't have in common is Kate is emotionally incredibly immature. ... She also doesn't want to confront things in her life."

Shahi said she is her character's opposite in that respect. "I'm very responsible when it comes to people's emotions and to be able to confront things and all of that. I've been doing that since I was about 8," she said.

Shahi said her work on *Fairly Legal* was especially demanding because she had to balance it with helping take care of her toddler son, Wolf. (Her husband is fellow actor Steve Howey.) "Unfortunately, babies don't sleep in, even if you wrap at 1 o'clock on a Saturday morning, and so I was up early with Wolf at 6 o'clock Saturday and Sunday and then had to start my days again 5 o'clock Monday morning, so I never had a moment to shut off," she said.

Filming is completed on the 10-episode first season of *Fairly Legal*, and the network will decide by the end of March whether to order a second season. Shahi also has supporting roles lined up in two movies, she said.

Shahi, born Aahoo Jahansouza Shahi and a great-great-granddaughter of a 19th-century Iranian ruler, Fath Ali Shah Qajar, grew up speaking Persian as well as English at her father's insistence. She said she never had much contact with the extended families of her immigrant parents, but "I like to celebrate where I come from and where my heritage lies," she said.

If other Iranian Americans make up a large portion of Shahi's fan base, she said she's not aware of it. But she said she has not paid much attention to the fame she has acquired. "I'm still surprised by the fact that I even have fans," she said.

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